

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

230738Z Dec 04

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 002121

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/PD-ZABRISKIE, Epstein-AF/W,
DeMars/Faux-Gable-EB/TRA/AN

LAGOS FOR PAS, ECON

DOT FOR OIA, ALSO FAA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KPAO](#) [FAIR](#) [SCUL](#) [OIIP](#) [PREL](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S. POSITION ON VIRGIN
NIGERIA AIRWAYS CRITICIZED

¶1. Summary: On December 16, PAS Abuja kicked off its Thursday media briefings with Embassy Econ Counselor Joseph Gregoire addressing about half a dozen media reps on the USG position on Virgin Nigeria Airways. Gregoire, supported by CPAO Claudia Anyaso, read verbatim from the talking points provided by Washington and then took questions. The media briefing was picked up by the major broadcast stations the same day and the front pages of some major Nigerian newspapers the following day. Quotes follow. End summary.

¶2. Independent Guardian, 12/17/04
"Virgin Nigeria May Not Ply US Route"

Briefing diplomatic correspondents yesterday, Gregoire said: "We face this current situation with Virgin Nigeria with deep regret after working so closely with Nigeria for so many years to establish the Nigerian service market.... If the Federal Government had selected an airline partner from a country other than the UK, the U.S. government, would be much more likely to give it favorable consideration."

¶3. Independent THISDAY, 12/17, 2004
"We Won't Allow Virgin Nigeria Deal - US"

"The United States government has formally said it will not allow the proposed Virgin Nigeria Airline to operate direct flights into its country [in] the same way the United Kingdom where Virgin Atlantic is based has refused to open the London market to US airlines.... The US Government, according to Gregoire, has a long-standing interest in improving air links with Africa and would welcome direct air service between the United States and Nigeria by a new Nigerian airline."

¶4. Nigeria Today Online, 12/17/04
"Virgin Nigeria Can't Operate in USA"

"We made our concerns known to both Virgin Atlantic and to the Nigerian Government well in advance of [the] conclusion of [the] partnership creating Virgin Nigeria.... Joseph Gegoire, U.S. Embassy official in Abuja[,] said Virgin Atlantic benefits from restrictions in US/UK bilateral relations and could not therefore benefit... from the open skies agreement between Nigeria and the US."

¶5. Independent Punch, 12/17/04
"US Bars Virgin Nigeria"

"The United States government has barred the new Nigerian flag carrier, Virgin Nigeria, from flying into its airspace.... The measure is coming in spite of the green light given by the federal government recently to a US carrier, Continental Airlines, to operate direct flights between Lagos and New York.... The envoy said, "'We have issues, serious issues with this new concern, Virgin Nigeria, which may apply to serve the US-Nigeria market. First, in our eyes, this is not a Nigerian airline. According to reports to the US Government by UK-based Virgin Atlantic, it is an airline that is under the control of Virgin Atlantic.'"

¶6. Independent Guardian, 12/22/04
"Government to Protest US Ban on Virgin Nigeria"

"The Federal Government has resolved to officially

protest to the United States against the decision not to allow the nation's new airline, Virgin Nigeria, to operate in that country. The government has denied that the airline is owned by Virgin Atlantic.... Minister of Aviation, Mallam Isa Yuguda, frowned at the allegation [of] U.S. officials that the new national carrier, Virgin Nigeria, is owned by Virgin Atlantic of Britain."

17. Confirming the tenor of the above articles, the Aviation Minister told the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria on December 17 that the US position on Virgin Nigeria is a "misconception."

FUREY